

Beauty beyond the towers

Multisensory nature trail opens on Three Mile Island

In the shadows of the Three Mile Island cooling towers rests a lovely semiwilderness area where hundreds of wildflowers, trees, trailing vines and huge ferns abound. It is the home of deer, chipmunks, squirrels and some unusual birds including white egrets and blue herons.

The solitude of this small wilderness, located on the southern end of the Island, is rarely disturbed. It's a part of Three Mile Island no one ever hears about—a bouquet of natural beauty, until now, inaccessible to the public.

Saturday, March 5, a 400-foot multisensory nature trail through the area was officially opened to the public. A group of Boy Scouts and their scoutmaster cut through the area's dense underbrush and designed and produced this nature trail for the handicapped.

The story behind the nature trail began on a Saturday in July 1982. Scoutmaster Herbert Sanchez, an EG&G Idaho employee on one-year assignment with the TMI Waste Immobilization Program, led his Scouts on a walking tour of the TMI wilderness. They were searching for a possible nature project.

"I first thought of doing a Scout nature project on the Island on my daily drive from the south entrance gate to the trailer complex where we work," Sanchez says. "I would see deer, wild waterfowl and small rodents almost every day and it seemed a shame that the natural beauty of the Island's south end was inaccessible to the public."

Sanchez prepared a detailed proposal for the GPU Nuclear management review, obtained permission from them to proceed with his plans, and work on the nature project began. After much deliberation, the Scouts decided to put in a multisensory nature trail for the blind in a small area along the waterfront on the Island's southwestern shore.

The Scouts built 23 pedestals and installed them along the 400-foot trail. Each pedestal has a braille plaque and an English card describing interesting aspects of the area.



There are also scent boxes capturing the essence of local plant fragrances in concentrated form. The trail took six months to complete. The



work involved marking the trail, clearing out dense underbrush and carrying away debris. "Some of the debris had a story all its own," comments Sanchez. "We apparently constructed our trail on the site of some old summer cottages built before the Island became home for the nuclear plant. We found floor boards, cottage roofs and even some old piers for docking boats along the waterfront."

The work was not only difficult but expensive. "GPU has been great about giving us building materials and supplies, but we still incurred a lot of expenses," Sanchez says. Several of Sanchez's EG&G Idaho TMI coworkers contributed to the project. They liked the idea of having a nature trail in the shadows of the cooling towers. Other money came from Scout fund-raising projects and from a local chapter of the Lions Club.

Sanchez says it has been a positive experience, one involving a lot of work, but rewarding in the end. "The nature trail has provided recreation and enjoyment and has been a pleasant complement to the technical challenge of my year here at TMI," he claims.